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U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

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INTERVIEW OF:

LT. GEN. RAYMOND ODIERNO

COMMANDING GENERAL
MULTINATIONAL CORPS - IRAQ

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24 JUNE 2007

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HEADQUARTERS MNC-1

BAGHDAD

Approved for Release

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from tapes provided by the Center of Military
History.)

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P R O C E E D I N G S

INTERVIEWER: This is (b)(3), (b)(6)

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the Multinational Corps-Iraq
Historian. Today is Sunday, the 24th of
June, 2007, at approximately 2000, here
interviewing Lt. Gen. Odierno, the Commanding
General of Multinational Corps-Iraq.

Good evening, sir.

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: (b)(3), (b)(6) how are
you.

INTERVIEWER: Good, sir. Sir, I
just wanted to ask the first question, which
is: When you took command of Multinational
Corps-Iraq on the (Inaudible) transfer
authority on the 14th of December, looking
back on that, what was your initial
assessment of the situation?

LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first
off, obviously, we've been working it for
six, seven, eight months prior to that as we
ramped up the war training, constant contact
with the Corps as well as MNF-I. So we tried

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1 to move forward with what they were doing as
2 we trained up.

3 As we began to do the transition
4 when I first got over here, at that time they
5 had just published guidance about
6 transitioning to Iraqi security forces, in
7 that the goal of the Corps would be from
8 December through 2007 the transition of all
9 security to Iraqi security forces and the
10 transfer to the provincial Iraqi control of
11 all of the provinces.

12 So when we first came in, that was
13 what we focused on. In fact, as we were
14 getting ready to come in, we were told that
15 we would probably go to 10 brigades, either
16 right when we got here or right after we got
17 here, and our force structure would be
18 reduced. Much more of the security operation
19 would be turned over to Iraqis.

20 Then when I got in here, maybe the
21 day before I took over or the day after,
22 General Keisley (Phonetic) came to me and

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1 said I would like your opinion on what we can
2 do in order to make a decisive improvement in
3 security within Baghdad; think about that,
4 and come back to me.

5 So that is when I really sat down
6 and I did an assessment of what was going on,
7 and I had a (Inaudible) group as well as my
8 planners kind of -- I gave them some things I
9 needed them to think through, and I kind of
10 gave them my initial impressions, having
11 walked around here.

12 A couple of things that we decided
13 at that time: One was, very clearly, that
14 the problem that we were facing was that you
15 had the Iraqi citizen that was looking for a
16 few things. They were looking for security,
17 individual security, security for their
18 family, basic services, employment, etcetera.

19 You had a brand new government of
20 Iraq that was in place, had been in place for
21 about eight or nine months. They were
22 attempting to provide these, but they were so

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1 immature and, in fact, what I call -- I call
2 it societal devastation, that the Iraqi
3 society after the fall of Saddam Hussein and
4 their ability to support the people was very
5 bad.

6 So because of that, you have this
7 large gap between what the Iraqi citizen
8 wants and what the government of Iraq could
9 provide. So what we had is, with all these
10 different groups trying to fill those gaps,
11 you had Shia extremists, JAM, other elements.

12 You had Al Qaeda.

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13 You had Turkey. You had all these
14 trying to influence these groups, trying to
15 co-op these groups, in fact, in order to gain
16 power within Iraq and gain control within
17 Iraq.

18 So what I decided was, in order
19 for us to be successful, I would have to
20 narrow that gap between the citizen and the
21 government, and there's three lines. We
22 decided we had to do it through security,

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1 diplomatic and governmental issues, and
2 economic issues.

3 In security, we made the decision
4 that we think, in order to do that, we must
5 protect the population; and in order to
6 protect the population, there's several
7 things that we would have to do.

8 First, we will have to really
9 reverse our strategy, which was to come out
10 of the cities into the large (Inaudible),
11 turn it over to Iraqis, and we would be just
12 transition teams with them.

13 So we kind of reversed that by
14 saying we think we need to be out in the
15 population. We need to help the Iraqis to
16 secure their population, to protect it, and
17 the only way to do that is to get out there
18 in a larger force in order to do that, both
19 Coalition and Iraqis working together.

20 (b)(6) Sir, let me interrupt
21 you here for a minute. This is (b)(6)
22 at the Center of Military History jumping in

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1 here.

2 That's a fundamental shift,
3 though, from what 5th Corps and General
4 Torelli (Phonetic) had been doing.

5 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Right.

6 (b)(6) And it involved some
7 risk, did it not?

8 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It did. I
9 think when we got here it was clear that
10 things were not going the way everyone wanted
11 them to go. Violence, murders were up.
12 Sectarian violence was significant. So
13 because of that, everybody realized that
14 there had to be a change of some sort. We
15 might have disagreed on the changes, but I
16 think everybody had finally come to the
17 conclusion there had to be a change.

18 That's when we started having this
19 discussion. So, you know, some people
20 thought like all we had to do was increase
21 the number of jobs, and the sectarian
22 violence would go away. So, you know, I

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1 think -- So that was one option.

2 My thought was the first thing we
3 had to do was protect the population, and the
4 jobs would come, and that was a different way
5 to look at it.

6 So we fundamentally changed from
7 transitioning to Iraqi security. So what I
8 wanted to do was fundamentally change from
9 transitioning to Iraqi security forces as
10 quickly as possible and go back to protecting
11 the population.

12 INTERVIEWER: And how did General
13 Casey (Phonetic) see that?

14 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I think
15 when we first started talking about it, I
16 think he knew something had to be done in
17 Baghdad specifically. So he understood that,
18 in order to have a decisive change in
19 Baghdad, that we would have to have a
20 fundamental change in what we were doing, and
21 I think he understood that. So we had many,
22 many discussions about that.

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1 He -- and so he -- We had several
2 conversations, and then we go into, in early
3 January/late December, okay, so if we do
4 this, what additional forces will we need to
5 do this; and we had a lot of interaction on
6 that.

7 He thought we only needed a very
8 small increase in order to effect a
9 significant change in Baghdad, and I felt
10 that we needed a bit bigger one, and we
11 continued to discuss it. We had several
12 iterations of that.

13 Then we finally -- I knew from
14 back channels with the Army that the absolute
15 most that they would be able to provide is
16 five brigades. So what we talked about was -
17 - He mentioned basically about two brigades
18 in Baghdad, what I felt is we should have
19 decision points all the way, because we know
20 all the brigades would not be able to get
21 here at one time.

22 So what I said is we know when the

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1 brigades can make it. About one a month is
2 what we were told it would be. So let's just
3 put up a bunch of decision points there and,
4 as we move one forward, you move another one
5 to Kuwait. As you move the second one
6 forward, you move the next one to Kuwait, and
7 then we could always make decision points
8 where we need them or not.

9 The other fundamental difference
10 we had is I wanted to add two battalions to
11 MNF-West, because I wanted to exploit the
12 success that was going on in the west.

13 When I got here, it was clear that
14 there was a fundamental change occurring in
15 MNF-West. It wasn't clear what it was going
16 to be yet, but they were making some
17 progress, and people were still very unsure
18 when I got here. You know, some of the intel
19 -- In fact, the MNF intel officer was still
20 not sure that there's much of a change. The
21 commander felt there was, and we had a lot of
22 discussions. General Zumner (Phonetic) and I

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1 had quite a few discussions about this.

2 So I wanted -- I felt if I was
3 able to get them two additional battalions,
4 they would be able to cover down on areas
5 they have never been able to cover down
6 before, which would allow them to -- in order
7 to gain more traction in order to work with
8 the tribes, and also to disallow Al Qaeda
9 from continuing to move up and down the
10 Euphrates River valley; and he agreed with
11 that, and so we had several discussions.

12 So it took me about 30 days to
13 convince General Casey of that, because he
14 did not see the need for that. He said,
15 well, it's going pretty good out there, you
16 know. And so we finally came to an agreement
17 on that.

18 INTERVIEWER: Sir, at what point,
19 as things evolved on the decision points for
20 General Petraeus, and he was identified to
21 come in to take charge of Multinational
22 Force-Iraq -- At what point, as you reflect

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1 back -- That can be something of an awkward
2 situation

3 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It was very
4 awkward. The decision was made in late
5 January, really middle of January, that
6 General Petraeus would be nominated. 8
7 January is when he went through the
8 nomination process, and they did have two
9 different views of what was going on and,
10 obviously, I got kind of caught in the middle
11 of all that. But I was true to both of them,
12 and I was very honest with both, and I told
13 them what I thought, and it worked out okay.

14 General Casey is a real
15 professional soldier, and he -- you know, he
16 worked very closely with me, and he didn't
17 always agree with what I recommended, but he
18 listened, and we came up at least with a plan
19 which I thought gave us lots of leeway and
20 options.

21 General Petraeus, when I first
22 started talking to him, was very clear what

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1 he wanted to do. He was in agreement, wanted
2 to move forward, wanted to get as many forces
3 in here as possible. So we had a couple of
4 conversations before he got over here.

5 INTERVIEWER: Did you feel like
6 ultimately then you were able to answer both
7 General Casey's desires and move ahead with
8 General Petraeus wanted?

9 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes, sure.
10 Yeah, and I think the decision point piece
11 was what really allowed me to do that.

12 The other thing -- I would like to
13 backtrack a little bit. The other thing that
14 I realized in the beginning was I really felt
15 we were able to define the complexity of
16 what was going on, and the complexity was --
17 this is not COIN; it's even more complicated
18 than COIN, counterinsurgency operations,
19 because of several things.

20 One, first you have the number one
21 issue was sectarian, which is really not
22 counterinsurgency. Sectarian violence is

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1 outside of counterinsurgency. It's not an
2 insurgency against the government; it is, in
3 fact, you know, two different sects fighting
4 against each other. So that was one piece.

5 Then you had -- You had the Sunni
6 insurgency. you had Al Qaeda. You had Al
7 Qaeda in Iraq. You had the Sunni on Shia
8 violence, which was the sectarian violence,
9 and then you had Shia on Shia violence, which
10 was power brokering, maneuvering for
11 position, maneuvering for position of power
12 throughout the country.

13 So we defined those, and then you
14 have the normal other things. You had
15 corruption. You had just pure criminality.
16 So those operated across the entire spectrum.

17 But what I told everybody was, it was
18 different depending on where you were at in
19 the country. So we couldn't look at it in
20 one specific way.

21 So what we did is -- You know, so
22 if you are in an Anbar, your threat is Al

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1 Qaeda, your threat is Al Qaeda. If you are
2 in Baghdad, it depends on what part of
3 Baghdad you are. Certain parts of Baghdad,
4 you have Al Qaeda, and you have the Sunni
5 insurgency. In other parts, you have Sunni
6 on Shia violence. You have the Sunni
7 insurgency. In another part you have Shia
8 extremism.

9 So what we've tried to talk to is
10 that you have to deal with each one of these
11 problems in a different way. So you had to
12 understand that. Depending on where your
13 brigade or battalion was, you had to deal
14 with the problem a bit differently, and we
15 were directing that, and that was part of the
16 recognition of this is even more complicated
17 than COIN, and then we talked about the
18 different ways that we were going to move
19 forward to try to accomplish this.

20 Now I don't want to -- We still
21 very much thought it was important, important
22 to define what the political goals were, and

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1 General Casey, I felt, did a very good job of
2 defining for Prime Minister Maliki what he
3 had to do, and where they had had problems in
4 the past.

5 First, you had to attack all --
6 You had to -- Attack is the wrong term. You
7 had to defeat all elements that (Inaudible)
8 on Iraq, just not Sunni elements. You know,
9 in the previous time they had only gone after
10 Sunnis when they had done the operations.
11 They really had not agreed to go after any of
12 the Shia.

13 He got Prime Minister Maliki to
14 understand this problem, and allowed us -- In
15 December we started going after in a very
16 large way Shia extremist targets; and when he
17 made a speech -- I think it was on the 6th of
18 January -- Prime Minister Maliki said we had
19 to go out to all enemies of the government of
20 Iraq, no matter what sect. That was huge.

21 He also talked them through the
22 importance of his Army and his police and

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1 using them to not having everybody giving
2 them orders but forming a chain of command,
3 having somebody in charge, having them held
4 responsible, and then came the formation of
5 the Baghdad Operational Command.

6 Then he laid out some other things
7 that he thought the Prime Minister had to do
8 (Inaudible) which is reconciliation,
9 hydrocarbon laws, provincial election laws;
10 and we worked very hard to work that piece of
11 it.

12 So, obviously, he had a military
13 piece, but he had a very important political
14 piece, and then the economic piece was our
15 ability to -- He got the Iraqis to -- and
16 General Petraeus finished this off, was
17 getting the money they had promised out to
18 Anbar Province, out to Klofur (Phonetic), and
19 that was huge in reaching out to the Sunnis.

20 They worked them in order to
21 finally have a budget that was given to each
22 one of the provinces this year for the first

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1 time, and so they can then do some
2 reconstruction on their own. So all those
3 things were the first steps that I felt were
4 very important and a part of this plan in
5 order to help the Iraqis move forward.

6 Then you had the (Inaudible) line
7 which is to continue to increase in
8 developing and equipping the Iraqi security
9 forces. So all of those were a part of this.

10 The one thing that we understood
11 coming in was the importance of force
12 protection while you are trying to defeat the
13 IED network, because we knew that was the
14 number one threat to our soldiers.

15 So we did a lot of training on
16 that, and the Divisions that came over, we
17 did a lot of work on trying to coordinate as
18 much as we can to defeat this threat. Up
19 until this point we have not been successful.

20 I mean, I think we are finding and clearing
21 more of them than they had ever had before.
22 We have really been able to take down some of

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1 the cell structure, but the one thing that I
2 realized when I got here is IEDs were so
3 proliferated, it was very difficult to get
4 inside the entire network, and that's what we
5 are trying to work through now.

6 INTERVIEWER: Sir, let me ask you
7 a question on the surge.

8 The United States went to Kuwait
9 in 1991 with 303,000 U.S. troops plus 200,000
10 Coalition troops. General Shinsecki
11 estimated that there would be several hundred
12 thousand troops needed to occupy Iraq. Even
13 by the standards of the new COIN manual, we
14 should have about several hundred thousand
15 counterinsurgents.

16 What makes you think as Commander
17 of MNC-I that a surge of some 30,000 up to
18 about 152,000 or 4,000 U.S. troops will make
19 the Iraqi population more secure today in
20 2007 than a year ago or two years ago?

21 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, now the
22 difference -- The difference, though, I'm

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1 sure, in 2003 and -04, is you do have an
2 Iraqi security force structure in place. You
3 know, I mean, you do have right now 10
4 divisions of the Iraqi army. You do have
5 nine brigades of the National Police. You do
6 have Iraqi police that have been trained.

7 So all of that counts, and should
8 be counting in those numbers now. So I mean,
9 that's what's changed, and their ability
10 continues to get better. It's not anywhere
11 near where it needs to be, but it's much
12 better than it was a year ago. It will be
13 much better next year.

14 So I think that is part of the
15 capital that makes me think that we will be
16 able to do this. That is also the weakness
17 of the plan.

18 I mean, the weakness of the plan
19 is none of really knows. I don't know how
20 well the Iraqi security forces will step up.

21 They have done okay in this operation so
22 far. They haven't done great. They have

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1 done okay. Now they are fighting
2 -- You know, two years ago they were running
3 when they got into a fight. Today they are
4 staying and fighting, and they are taking
5 casualties. They have a replacement program
6 where they replace them, but they still have
7 weaknesses in their capabilities.

8 They still have -- They are
9 lacking a lot of leadership. They are short
10 leaders, and it tends to be mid-grade leaders
11 in that they don't have -- they are still
12 developing, the lieutenant colonel/colonel
13 level. So I mean, that is one of the
14 question marks.

15 INTERVIEWER: Sir, a question
16 about your operating style with your staff.
17 It's been interesting to me to meet most of
18 your key staff, to interview a number of
19 them, and a certain word has come up a number
20 of times, which is leadership, as a
21 description of the way that you like to work
22 as a commander, which if I understood them

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1 properly, is more of a small decision making
2 process, depending on the subject, bringing
3 in those key players, but working through to
4 a final conclusion as opposed to perhaps a
5 broader, "everybody is included"
6 presentation.

7 Is that --

8 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first,
9 when I got here, we started doing things in
10 very large groups where you have 100 people
11 in the room, and I was very uncomfortable
12 with that.

13 One of the things, when I develop
14 plans and decisions, I want to be interactive
15 with my people. When there's 100 people, you
16 can't be interactive. You can't be honest.
17 You know, it might not be -- you're not quite
18 sure who is there in the room, who is not in
19 the room, and it's not your close staff that
20 you work with.

21 So what I decided to do is go into
22 a bit of a smaller group and work more

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1 interactive so I get more feedback, more
2 information, and then allow them to go out
3 and work with the rest of the staff. I've
4 been very pleased with the maximum insight.
5 It has actually enabled us to make decisions
6 much faster and cut through a lot of red
7 tape, in my mind, a lot of bureaucracy.

8 I'm not a fan of -- Maybe it's
9 more I'm impatient. I'm not a fan. We used
10 to have boards and meetings and, you know, we
11 have a board for this, a board for that. In
12 my mind, this is about results. This is
13 about producing information that helps and
14 products that help our subordinate commands.

15 This is not about process, and I felt like
16 we got so involved in process, we forgot
17 about the output.

18 So I was very focused on trying to
19 get output as fast as I could and as quality
20 output as I could. So that's a comment on
21 why I went there. It's not that I -- I
22 don't like soothing people. I like -- One of

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1 the things I like to do is get opinions and
2 understand what those are. But it was too
3 early. I just did not feel comfortable.

4 INTERVIEWER: Am I right in
5 understanding then that you chose that path
6 because of what you had observed here or is
7 that also a style you tried at other times?

8 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, yes. I
9 mean, I think this is the first time. Even
10 when I was a Division commander, I never had
11 groups the size that was showing up for these
12 meetings that I had here. Yes. Then they
13 would be on VGC and everybody else in the
14 world, and I just felt very uncomfortable
15 about some of the people who would be
16 involved in our decision making process.

17 So I felt that it just was not a
18 good situation. So -- And I have to
19 interact. I like to interact. Now I've
20 still got plenty of people coming in. It's
21 not like it's two people, three people. It's
22 significantly reduced from what it was.

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1 INTERVIEWER: One more dynamic
2 question about the way you like to work. Can
3 you speak a little bit about -- and of
4 course, especially in this coalition
5 environment, you have an array of deputy
6 Commanding Generals, your Chief of Staff.
7 Can you speak a little bit about your
8 decision process in deciding how to use them
9 and how you like to work with them?

10 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first it
11 was -- It was somewhat in place, but I'm
12 actually more fortunate, because before us
13 there was a British Deputy. There was an
14 Italian who was Coalition, and there was a
15 Fifth Corps DCG and then their Commander and
16 the Chief.

17 I have a Canadian DCG that is part
18 of III Corps. It's an agreement III Corps
19 have with the Canadian Army for years and
20 years and years. So I brought him over, and
21 he was able to fill that Coalition position,
22 which to my mind gives me a great advantage.

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1 I'm comfortable with him. I've worked with
2 him for a long time. So it's made it very
3 good, but anyhow -- and that's my second
4 British DCG.

5 When we were training up, we
6 decided -- I went through all of this. I had
7 one of the former British DCGs came to our
8 training program. We worked through, and so
9 we were very -- back then defined what each
10 one of the DCGs would do.

11 The DCG-US was responsible for the
12 separate brigades. I have a piece of paper I
13 need to give you. If you want it, I can give
14 it to you, defining the lines of what I gave
15 them. But fundamentally, the DCG-US is
16 responsible for the separates and is
17 responsible for logistical support of
18 Multinational Corps. There's other things he
19 does, too, but those are two major things.

20 The DCG-UK is responsible -- He's
21 my operations and intel. but what he e really
22 does is he is my interface with our Iraqi

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1 counterparts, which is to sift through the
2 Iraqi ground forces command and the Baghdad
3 operational command. Now it is not
4 (Inaudible). He does it on a daily basis.

5 My DCG-Canadian does Coalition
6 operations, Coalition forces, but he also
7 does my infrastructure. So he is responsible
8 for being my representative and working the
9 oil infrastructure, the electrical
10 infrastructure, etcetera.

11 Then the Chief of Staff does the
12 normal Chief of Staff functions, you know,
13 coordinating operation of the staff, as well
14 as coordinating our products with MNF-I, and
15 we have very clearly defined all that and
16 gave that to them. We did it during the
17 exercises. They understood what they had to
18 do coming in, and I have been very, very
19 pleased.

20 INTERVIEWER: Sir, we talked --
21 You had mentioned the rather dramatic change
22 where you decided not to commute to the fight

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1 but go in and stay in the JSSs and the COPs,
2 the Joint Security Stations and the Combat
3 Outposts.

4 You started that, I believe, in
5 February.

6 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It was before
7 that. It was in January, January/February.

8 INTERVIEWER: January? January
9 and February? And you -- I believe, in
10 February you renamed Together Forward. You
11 renamed it FARDEL (Phonetic) Command.

12 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, the
13 Iraqis named it.

14 INTERVIEWER: The Iraqis did. Can
15 you talk a little bit about -- behind how
16 that name came about?

17 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first
18 off, the one part I did leave out is there
19 was a meeting that happened between Prime
20 Minister Maliki and President Bush in
21 December in Jordan, and they came to an
22 agreement on security and what the way

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1 forward would be. I don't know the exact of
2 it. It was just before I came over here, but
3 that's when they decided they would do a
4 joint plan in Baghdad, basically.

5 They agreed, you know, the Iraqis
6 would be in the lead; we would be in support
7 of them. So that also gets to the reason why
8 -- I skipped that earlier -- why General
9 Casey asked me to put together something
10 precise. It was all part of this -- all this
11 that was going on at one time. Trying to
12 think what FARDEL stands for. I forget.
13 I've said FARDEL so many times, I forget what
14 the translation is.

15 INTERVIEWER: Enforcing the law?

16 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes, enforcing
17 the law. So what we -- We started talking
18 about it. We started to talk about names
19 with the Iraqis. First, the Iraqis came up,
20 presented us their plan, and they divided it
21 into 10 security districts. They did all of
22 that.

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1 INTERVIEWER: This is in February?

2 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: This is in
3 December/January, end of December, beginning
4 of January. They defined all the security
5 districts. They defined -- They talked to us
6 about standing up the Baghdad Operations
7 Command, all of that.

8 Then we would have meetings three
9 times a week with the Iraqi leadership, with
10 their security leadership, MOI, MOB, my
11 national security advisor, the OCINC, and
12 then also the Prime Minister would be there
13 once or twice a week where we discussed what
14 the plan would be and how we would move
15 forward, or we would describe what we felt
16 was appropriate. General Casey led that. I
17 was there in support, and that's where we
18 talked about controlling the population, all
19 those things.

20 What Prime Minister Maliki said in
21 a couple of his speeches was we are going to
22 enforce the law within Baghdad and around

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1 Iraq. So that's where we tried to come up
2 with Enforce the Law, but it didn't translate
3 properly in English. English to Iraqi
4 doesn't translate right. So the closest
5 thing in Iraqi is FARDEL (Inaudible). So we
6 decided not to have an American name to it,
7 and we would use their name since it was an
8 Iraqi led operation.

9 So FARDEL (Inaudible) is Enforce
10 the Law. It doesn't quite translate like
11 that. It translates a little bit different
12 from that. That's why we -- So we decided to
13 go with that joint name.

14 INTERVIEWER: I saw, you know,
15 documents that MNC-I, your documents, that
16 refer to it about mid-February, which would
17 put it right around the time after General
18 Casey left and General Petraeus came in. So
19 I wondered if --

20 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: No, I think
21 General Casey was --

22 INTERVIEWER: -- General Casey was

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1 here. Okay. Okay.

2 INTERVIEWER: Sir, I wanted to ask
3 about -- and you spoke about the fact that
4 each region has a different kind of fight on
5 its hands, and I wanted to ask a little bit
6 about the MNC Southeast region, which is
7 predominantly Shia.

8 It seems as if -- and, obviously,
9 there are political forces at play for the UK
10 that's down there as well, but they have been
11 very quick to move ahead with the moving to
12 provisional Iraqi control, and I kind of
13 wanted to get your impression of what's the
14 right balance between when we hand over that
15 provisional Iraqi control, because obviously,
16 there's two ways we can go, that we say here
17 you go, you got it, or there's metrics in
18 place.

19 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, and the
20 southeast region is kind of difficult. First
21 of all, they were supposed to do it in April,
22 and I've kept pushing it back, and I'll talk

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1 a little bit about that. Now it is scheduled
2 in August, if it goes well.

3 The problem with Basra is, first,
4 it's Shia on Shia violence. It's JAM, Fatar
5 (Phonetic), Fidela (Phonetic) party trying to
6 all gain control of Basra, which probably is
7 the second largest city in Iraq, clearly, I
8 would argue, a very important city
9 economically because of the Port of Um Qasr
10 and everything has to do with the export of
11 oil and everything else. So it is an
12 extremely important part.

13 When I got here, what we found was
14 -- is there was some infighting ongoing down
15 in Basra. You had a security structure. The
16 10th Iraqi Army was not quite stood up yet,
17 and it was not doing very much. The police
18 chief was controlled by Jaish al-Mahdi. You
19 had -- They had stood up an emergency
20 security council which was -- Three
21 individuals in it were enforcement put in by
22 Jaish al-Mahdi.

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1 So the problem was that it was a
2 security structure that could not work in
3 Basra. So what's happening down in Basra is
4 Jaish al-Mahdi continues to attack the
5 Coalition base down there, with indirect fire
6 mostly, and it is more just because they want
7 to. They want the Coalition to go. They
8 want to gain control of the political
9 structure within Basra.

10 What we are trying to do -- So a
11 couple of things about it. First, the 10th
12 Iraqi Army has got new leadership. It has
13 improved 100 percent. It is a fairly good
14 outfit that has conducted operations with the
15 Coalition partners and really been pretty
16 good.

17 We have just now replaced the
18 Provincial Director of Police. They are now
19 going to stand up with Basra Operational
20 Command. They are going to link all of the
21 command instruments together. They have
22 eliminated that executive steering committee

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1 for security. So they have started to do all
2 the things. That's all happened within the
3 last couple of weeks. So we will have to
4 wait and see exactly how that works out.

5 The problem is Basra is Shia on
6 Shia, and I think it can be solved fairly
7 easily, and I think it is more -- Iraqis
8 could probably solve it better than we can,
9 especially since it is Shia on Shia.

10 So I think if we turned it over, I
11 think you will see it to be okay, but we've
12 got to make sure that the security structure
13 that is set up is appropriate. That's what I
14 am more concerned about, is the structure
15 itself.

16 So I think -- and the British, of
17 course -- and the fundamental when I came in
18 -- I mean, the bottom line is the British
19 have changed their strategy. Their strategy
20 within the Middle East is a focus on
21 Afghanistan and not Iraq. So they are trying
22 to transition as many forces as they can to

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1 Afghanistan. Their army is not big enough to
2 do both Afghanistan and Iraq at the size we
3 need to. So they need to reduce their force
4 in Iraq so they can send more forces to
5 Afghanistan. That is part of this equation.

6 So they have decided to reduce
7 their forces, and one of the things I have
8 talked about with them is -- I think they
9 were supposed to go to 4,000. We talked them
10 only going to 5500, because we felt they were
11 not ready to go all the way down to 4,000
12 because of the security structure that was in
13 place and the violence that was going on.

14 So we were able to get them to
15 change that, but they are still working to go
16 down to 4,000. I think as soon as they go to
17 essentially Iraqi control, they will be down
18 to 4,000.

19 INTERVIEWER: Sir, why does it
20 seem like to an observer like myself that you
21 are putting more emphasis now in June of '07
22 on reconciliation as opposed to, say, back in

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1 March or February?

2 You mentioned reconciliation in
3 your documents back then, but now it seems to
4 be at the forefront and, in fact, your 07/01
5 mentions it as a key task -- second key task.

6 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, again
7 it's about me doing an evaluation when I got
8 over here, and it is about -- It's several
9 things. First, we'll change this.

10 We have these groups reaching out
11 to us on several different levels. So they
12 kept asking us, and we kept meeting with
13 them. I would meet with them. General Lamb,
14 the DCG, was really in charge of this piece
15 before General Petraeus was working this.

16 So what we found is we kept
17 getting these groups that wanted to come and
18 say we want to fight Al Qaeda; we want to
19 work with the Coalition. And of course, it
20 took us a couple of months to sort through it
21 to decide whether we thought it was real or
22 not.

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1 Then we kept watching what was
2 happening in Anbar, and that continued to
3 move forward very quickly. The tribes, one
4 by one -- I think there is like 18 tribes.
5 We started out with four or five who worked
6 with us, then 10, then 12, then 14, then 15.

7 I think there is now only two that aren't
8 still.

9 So we watched how that went and
10 how they continued to improve security, how
11 it was working was possible, and that, in
12 fact, these groups that were either passive
13 and just allowed things to happen and didn't
14 help or were actually part of these groups
15 were now working with us and really making a
16 difference in the security.

17 So we started discussing, General
18 Petraeus, myself and General Lamb, about, you
19 know, why can't this work other places. So
20 although -- and we saw reconciliation, we
21 still see reconciliation as a government of
22 Iraq task, but we decided that we thought it

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1 could work here.

2 The second thing that happened is
3 we had a battalion commander down in Abu
4 Ghraib, [REDACTED] Commander of 25
5 Cavalry, who on his own in March or so got
6 contacted by Ansar al-Sunna and some other
7 groups down there who said we will provide
8 you information about Al Qaeda, and they gave
9 him some information. We executed it, and it
10 was very, very accurate, good information.
11 We were able to take down several key targets
12 of Al Qaeda, [REDACTED] was, and we took a couple
13 down ourselves.

14 He continued to work with them,
15 and they said, all we want is -- you know, we
16 have young men who want to join the Iraqi
17 security force who have not been able to join
18 the Iraqi security forces. So he started
19 holding meetings with them.

20 Well, he got to a point where he
21 just couldn't do it anymore. It was really
22 too big of an issue for him. So, you know, I

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1 went down there, started to take that on, and
2 we continue to work that. We now have 1500
3 that want to join, and we think we've got --
4 1900. We think we got agreement with the
5 government of Iraq to do that.

6 So that was the other thing that
7 happened. So we had Anbar. We had groups
8 contacting us. We actually had this group in
9 Abu Ghraib who -- Abu Ghraib is one of the
10 most violent places we have. It is now not
11 violent at all due to its Coalition forces.
12 They helped us to gain some very good
13 information to target Al Qaeda. So that was
14 kind of a proof to us that they were willing
15 to work with us.

16 INTERVIEWER: These are mostly
17 Sunni?

18 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: These are
19 mostly Sunnis.

20 So that started us saying we ought
21 to take a look at this.

22 Then we started -- With all the

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1 attention in the Arab press that was given to
2 the Anbar salvation group, it was amazing.
3 Other Iraqis of all -- from Diyala, from
4 Ninevah, Saladin (Phonetic) now said we want
5 to be part of that, too; we want to do the
6 same thing. And again, they continue to
7 contact us.

8 So because of that, we knew that -
9 - we felt this was something we needed to
10 exploit and needed to take advantage of. And
11 we decided that in March and April we would
12 just continue to mature it, and now we have
13 made it part of our permanent organization,
14 and now have a reconciliation cell that's
15 full time, that is working this.

16 So I think that is probably what
17 caused the changes, a variety of different
18 things. It is something we always wanted to
19 do, but it is something that really presented
20 an opportunity. So it's a matter of taking
21 the opportunity or not taking the
22 opportunity. We decided to take the

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1 opportunity.

2 INTERVIEWER: I am going to change
3 the tape.

4 It seems one of the issues there
5 in the work with the government of Iraq is
6 can you speak a little bit to the process of
7 convincing or whatever -- if there was a
8 convincing process, because of the sectarian
9 issues, because of the Shia elements in the
10 government, that he is primarily the source
11 of this anti-al Qaeda movement in particular
12 (Several words inaudible) how is that
13 balancing the structure?

14 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It's hard.
15 Well, let me throw some of it back and kind
16 of talk about the government of Iraq anyhow.

17 First, they are making some
18 progress, but it's slow. They are struggling
19 to move forward as a government, but they are
20 making -- The meetings they have today are so
21 much more sophisticated than meetings we had
22 in the summer. So I've seen a huge increase,

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1 at least in their ability to organize
2 themselves and go through decision making
3 processes, which is good.

4 What we still don't have is we
5 still have is distrust even between the
6 Coalition and the Iraqis. You have a
7 distrust between different groups within the
8 Iraqis, and that holds them back from making
9 real progress, in my mind.

10 The distrust is created over years
11 of educational biases, cultural differences,
12 you know, a whole bunch of things,
13 misunderstandings. So it is one of the
14 difficult things you have to work through
15 every single day.

16 What I was concerned with when we
17 started this plan was none of us wanted
18 General Aboud to be the Commander of the
19 Baghdad operation. We felt he was sectarian.

20 We thought he did not want to work with the
21 Coalition. We thought that it was the worst
22 of our -- worst case scenario. But since we

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1 have been working with him on a daily basis -
2 - We put a Colonel with him, (b)(3), (b)(6)
3 (b)(3), (b)(6) whose sole job is to work -- He's
4 with him 24 hours a day just about, Middle
5 Eastern (Inaudible) who came out from I Corps
6 staff.

7 We sent officers over there. We
8 sent lots of time with them, and the
9 relationship has actually been tremendous.
10 He is a good commander. He is not sectarian.
11 He is trying to do the right thing. He is
12 under a lot of political pressure from a lot
13 of different groups. He handles that about
14 as well as you could expect. He is very,
15 very dedicated to the Prime Minister, which
16 is good, and he should be. So, you know, he
17 does answer to the Prime Minister first, but
18 really been a pleasant surprise.

19 Then we went through a lot to
20 stand up their staff. I mean, we spent a lot
21 of time and effort. We brought people over
22 from Leavenworth to help them train. We

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1 helped train, had a lot of my staff over
2 there. Their staff is much smaller.

3 So we've really built these
4 relationships that I think are pretty good.

5 INTERVIEWER: And that was the BOK
6 staff?

7 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: That was the
8 BOK, yes.

9 Now let me -- The question you
10 asked me, really, was the sectarian,
11 sectarian in the government? Is that --

12 INTERVIEWER: Relative to taking
13 advantage of this opportunity for
14 reconciliation originating out of the --

15 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: It is very
16 difficult for them. You know, this is a
17 government who is still struggling to
18 maintain itself. It is feeling like it is
19 under pressure from a lot of different areas.

20 It is under pressure from the United States.

21 It is under pressure from the whole Shia
22 bloc. It is under pressure from the Sunni

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1 bloc, and they still have this deep seated
2 anxiety reference Baathists, probably
3 rightfully so, considering what they have
4 been through over the last several decades.

5 So they see them as Baathists and
6 people who want to potentially overthrow the
7 government. So we have to work very carefully
8 with them and help them to understand that,
9 in fact, that is not the case. In fact, this
10 is better for you, if they drop their arms
11 and come on your side and help fight Al
12 Qaeda. But in the back of their mind, I
13 believe they would expect a potential coup
14 where the military could turn on their
15 (Inaudible) having too many Sunnis in the
16 military.

17 So we've got to constantly talk
18 with them about this, and it causes issues,
19 and it makes them very uncomfortable. Anbar
20 was okay, because Anbar is way out there. We
21 are not worried about Anbar. That's way out
22 there in the desert, you know, in the west

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1 and along the Euphrates. Abu Ghraib got
2 their attention, because Abu Ghraib is a lot
3 closer to Baghdad. So working with Abu
4 Ghraib makes them very, very nervous, and the
5 closer you get to Baghdad it makes them very,
6 very nervous.

7 INTERVIEWER: Sir, I know you like
8 to get around to the units on the ground,
9 talk to our soldiers. I would like to get
10 some sense of how you as the Commanding
11 General of this Corps feel or react when you
12 see reports of soldiers that are killed by
13 IEDs, and what do you tell the soldiers like
14 that unit in 573 that was described in the
15 Coalition Chronicle?

16 What do you tell the soldiers of
17 the units that survive?

18 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I mean,
19 first off, I do like to get around, and I go
20 out probably four or five times a week for an
21 afternoon, and I do that for a reason.

22 I do that to -- I do that so I can

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1 touch, small, sense, feel, understand what is
2 going on, so when I make decisions, I really
3 have a good understanding.

4 In fact, I've found myself having
5 a much better situational knowledge when I
6 come back, so I can deal with a lot of the
7 issues we deal with, because I am out there,
8 and I can talk from a position of knowing.
9 So it's very good.

10 Well, first off, it is very
11 difficult -- It's not difficult; it's
12 appropriate that I'm out there with those
13 soldiers after they have lost -- I go out
14 there to talk to the leaders, because this is
15 -- When you lose a bunch of soldiers, it's
16 about leadership, and it's about the junior
17 leaders understanding that they are the ones
18 who have to deal with this, and they are the
19 ones that have to keep that unit moving
20 forward.

21 When I went out to see
22 (Inaudible), it was extremely easy, because

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1 the company commander and the First Sergeant
2 were just incredible young leaders who had
3 put this company back together, and I got
4 there two days after it happened, and they
5 were already moving forward, still mourning
6 the loss of their good friends, but they have
7 a motivator. They had them thinking through
8 what their next step was, what they had to
9 do, what their next mission was, that they
10 had a mission to accomplish.

11 So what I was there to tell them
12 is, first, that, you know, we still do have a
13 mission to accomplish, and you have to take -
14 - You still have to take care of yourselves.
15 You have to work with each other to make
16 sure that you are able to protect yourselves
17 and continue to do the things you are asked,
18 and you should do this in memory of those
19 guys who were there with you and wanted to be
20 there with you, because they were volunteers,
21 and they would want you to be successful in
22 what you are trying to do now.

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1 You know, with them I sat down. I
2 talked to about three or four sergeants and
3 staff sergeants. It was about five of them.

4 We just talked about 30 minutes. You know,
5 what they talked about was just the fact that
6 what was important to them was to move
7 forward and how they had to move forward, a
8 very, very good session.

9 I just wanted to let them know
10 that, although I'm the Corps Commander, it
11 means a lot to me, their sacrifices. And
12 that is one of the things I also try to do
13 when I'm with the soldiers, you know, that I
14 do appreciate the sacrifice they are making,
15 especially with the strategy of the JSSes
16 (Phonetic) and the COPs.

17 I go to every JSS and COP, and I
18 go out there for a reason. I go there,
19 first, to show we are integrated with the
20 Iraqis but, secondly, to let them know how
21 important it is, what they are doing and why
22 we are doing this strategy.

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1 One of the things I've been a
2 little disappointed with in some units is
3 their communication on why we are doing it,
4 why we are out there, and what are we trying
5 to accomplish.

6 So I go out there and try to
7 explain it to them. I hope they tie in a
8 couple of commanders, and in 90 percent of
9 them they have, but there's a few that have
10 not, and so the soldiers are kind of
11 wondering why we are doing this, you know,
12 what's the difference, why (Inaudible) inside
13 walking through that. I give them a chance
14 to talk to me about it. So I think that's
15 pretty important.

16 I also get a good sense of the
17 relationship between our troops and the Iraqi
18 -- troops from Iraqi, and that's pretty
19 helpful, too.

20 INTERVIEWER: Sir, as you look
21 back during the preparation phase, knowing
22 that -- having been here before and knowing

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1 you were going to take the Corps over here,
2 is there any particular theorist or study of
3 previous warfare that you found to be most --

4 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, not
5 really. But what I did do is I read as many
6 counter-insurgency manuals, books, but none
7 of them really -- But all they do is inform.

8 What I thought -- Of course, I
9 stayed in touch with this, and I followed it;
10 and I got promoted and became the Assistant
11 to the Chairman, and part of my job there was
12 Iraq portfolio, and I was an advisor to the
13 Secretary of State. So, you know, I was
14 involved with Iraq and Afghanistan with her.

15 So I was involved with the
16 (Inaudible) at the political level with what
17 was going on. I tried to stay connected with
18 what was going on, but you never can stay
19 connected tactically when you are at that
20 level. But what I really wanted to do was
21 continue to watch and understand what exactly
22 is happening. What has -- because it changed

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1 significantly from when I left and came back.

2 When I left -- and I left in March
3 of '04 -- you know, I could walk -- You know,
4 I walked down every street in Samarra. I
5 walked down the street in Kirkuk. I walked
6 down every street in Tikrit. I walked down
7 every street in Baqubah.

8 I mean, the last 60 days I was in
9 command, I didn't have any deaths. There was
10 a different Iraq when I came back. It was a
11 very different Iraq, for a lot of different
12 reasons, sectarian violence that had
13 occurred. Insurgency, in my mind, had
14 increased in its capability.

15 So I had to understand what that
16 meant. One of the things changed, we now had
17 a government -- Iraqis had their own
18 government in place. They now had to shift
19 the amount of security forces. They didn't
20 have it all in one (Inaudible) the first
21 time. They were just starting.

22 So there had been some really

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1 significant changes. So I had to make sure I
2 understood what all those changes were,
3 understood the fact that we are in a counter-
4 insurgency fight and how do I apply all of
5 those things? How do I apply counter-
6 insurgency doctrine? How do I apply it in
7 the environment that we are operating in,
8 which I described earlier as a bit more
9 complex than counter-insurgency.

10 So I really tried to think through
11 that, and there were no answers. One thing I
12 came to is there are no answers to this. But
13 the answers are that you have to decentralize
14 to (Inaudible). It's a battalion and brigade
15 commander's fight.

16 What I have to do is build a sense
17 of our resources and of our strategy,
18 operational concepts and guidance, and then
19 (Inaudible) and then discuss it, and that's
20 what I try to do.

21 INTERVIEWER: Sir, Multinational
22 Division North has on at least two occasions

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1 that I could recall requested and received
2 reinforcements, requested reinforcements from
3 General Mixon. And I noticed in your latest
4 operations order, you have created an
5 operational reserve of a battalion, and I
6 wondered how difficult it is in this COIN
7 environment to keep a reserve, and do we have
8 enough troops to keep a reserve in --

9 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Well, committee
10 members are (Inaudible).

11 INTERVIEWER: Right.

12 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: But first, we
13 worked through that together. I mean, that
14 came across in the press much differently
15 than what really happened, frankly.

16 (Inaudible) was an economy of
17 force mission in Mosul, Kirkut, Tikrit, all
18 the way down, and even in Baqubah when I got
19 here. Again, as I told you, I was a division
20 commander in Baqubah, and when I went down
21 there in January, I walked up -- one of the
22 first trips I went on was Baqubah, and the

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1 hairs stood up on the back of my neck when I
2 went through Baqubah, and I knew that
3 fundamentally there was something extremely
4 wrong in Baqubah when I got in there.

5 I knew that we didn't own that
6 town. We couldn't secure it, that something
7 had changed. So we started -- So it got my
8 attention very early on, and right back then
9 I went to (Inaudible) and said I know you've
10 been in economy of force, but let's have a
11 discussion. I at sometime -- I'm going to
12 tell you, we are going to have to go into
13 Baqubah and clear it and control it again,
14 and we have to figure out how to do this.

15 So I kind of set him off, and he
16 started working it. So when the surge
17 started, I kept asking him, look, I want to
18 see your plans on how we are going to secure
19 Baqubah and how we can do the northern
20 (Inaudible), and when he came back, he said
21 this is what it will take for me to do this.

22 So, you know, it wasn't like he --

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1 We had been talking about this for a long
2 time and, actually, I knew it all along from
3 the first time I went down there, that we
4 were going to have to do something.

5 So bottom line is here's the other
6 thing that I would say that has to do with
7 number of forces. When I first started
8 looking at Baghdad and securing Baghdad, the
9 Iraqis just kept saying to me it's not
10 Baghdad itself, it's the outskirts of Baghdad
11 that creates violence in Baghdad.

12 It's always been that way, and it
13 is that way today. So I mean, I kept
14 listening to that. You know, we were worried
15 about securing the population of Baghdad. So
16 I was kind of headed in that direction.

17 Then in late December, 11 Cav up
18 in Taji (Phonetic) uncovered al Qaeda's plan
19 for Baghdad. We did a raid. We uncovered --
20 had all their plans, and their plan was -- I
21 had a chart somewhere. They had a plan that
22 talked about controlling the belts, you will

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1 control Baghdad, and their plan was first to
2 control the belts and then control Baghdad.

3 I asked my planners to go back.
4 What did Saddam Hussein do when he was here?

5 Well, what did he do? He had all of the
6 Republic Guard divisions in the Baghdad
7 belts, surrounding Baghdad, to control those
8 belts.

9 So I looked at that. I looked at
10 al Qaeda's plan. I listened to what the
11 Iraqis said to me, and I said, one of the
12 things we are going to have to do is we have
13 to be after these belts. That's where the
14 accelerants are. That's where the truck
15 bombs and car bombs are, and so we are going
16 to have to get in there, and we are going to
17 have to -- As part of securing Baghdad, you
18 are going to have to secure that or you are
19 going to continue to have large, violent
20 events.

21 So as we then looked at the surge
22 strategy, there was not only reinforcing

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1 Baghdad. It was reinforcing the belts
2 themselves, which contributed directly to the
3 violence in Baghdad.

4 So that's when I came to the
5 decision I had to do this work in the belts
6 as well as do work in Baghdad.

7 The hardest thing about this has
8 been I've had to break up brigade combat
9 teams, and that's been hard for me. I would
10 rather have kept them together, but since I
11 couldn't change how we were on the ground
12 already, it would have taken too long, and I
13 would have had too much -- What you want is
14 just keep the familiarity on the ground and
15 the people that were there.

16 So what I did was -- You know, we
17 ended up out of -- and (Inaudible) battalions
18 as combat battalions. So out of the 20
19 battalions that came in, 13 went into Baghdad
20 -- 12 went into Baghdad; eight went outside
21 of Baghdad, but I have actually two brigades
22 outside of Baghdad and three inside. But the

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1 brigades outside of Baghdad aren't full
2 brigades. They don't have all the
3 battalions. We put more of the battalions
4 inside.

5 So I never realized I would be
6 managing battalions and, in some cases, as a
7 corps commander I managed divisions and
8 brigades. But I'm managing battalions, and I
9 never really thought I would do that.

10 That gets back to the
11 decentralizing nature of this fight. So you
12 know, it's one of the things I have learned
13 since I've been here, actually.

14 Here is a copy of -- That map on
15 the left there is the map. This is the map
16 that we found. "Battle of the Baghdad Belt"
17 was the title of it.

18 INTERVIEWER: That was in January,
19 sir?

20 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: December.

21 INTERVIEWER: December. Very
22 interesting.

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1 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: And then this
2 is how Saddam Hussein brought this, and
3 that's our assessment there.

4 INTERVIEWER: Sir, we are at the
5 end of our time with you. I appreciate your
6 taking the time to spend with us today.

7 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: We will
8 probably do this again, I guess.

9 INTERVIEWER: Yes, sir. We need
10 to do it, sir, probably in another month or
11 two, probably should do it every month or two
12 with you, if you can make the time. I know
13 you've got lots, of course, to do, and
14 historians aren't near the top of your list.

15 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: I probably
16 should give you some documents, too.

17 INTERVIEWER: Yes, sir.

18 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Some of my
19 documents that I have developed. You know,
20 the initiative you stuff to do, which is
21 really the fundamental thing that shaped my -
22 - I think we have copies out there -- my

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1 initiative that I worked with every night for
2 about a month and came up with a plan. That
3 was for [1.4a]. That's probably background for
4 [1.4a], but that's what also shaped my thoughts
5 for what we are doing now.

6 INTERVIEWER: Can I get with [b)(6)
7 on this?

8 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes. I think -
9 - They are out there, I think, [b)(6) and those
10 folks out there. I think it's important for
11 you to see that.

12 INTERVIEWER: Sir, I am going to
13 be coming back. The way the Corps did it
14 with the Center of Military History is that I
15 would be here with you six months and then
16 come back with you a month at Fort Hood to
17 wrap up, because I know you are going to do
18 an AAR there.

19 So I will be coming back from time
20 to time.

21 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Okay. Sure.
22 And you will be --

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1 LT. GEN. ODIERNO: Yes, sir.

2 (Whereupon, the interview was
3 concluded.)

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